Central American NEWSLETTER

Newsletter of the Central American Group of the Spanish Main Society.

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EDITORIAL

We are grateful to those members who responded to our plea for articles covering Costa Rica and Guatemala. We offer the first fruits in this issue and have more to follow. At the same time, we hope our Nicaragua, Salvador and Honduras enthusiasts will keep us fully supplied with articles, so that this News Letter may offer something for everyone interested in C.A..

Of course, editors are never satisfied, but it seems to us that there is still one glaring deficiency - the absence of response to Causerie items, only about one in three provoking anyone else to write; and even the rather slender quantity of points raised for discussion and of information sought. This Causerie should be one of the main features of the News Letter designed to keep members in touch with others who share their interests, so that we can mutually assist one another. May we repeat the definition "a Newsletter in which we exchange information, not a magazine in which we hand it out".

The Spanish Main A.G.M. on July 9th maintained the status quo, both for subscriptions (held at the same level, and now due, please) and office-holders. It is good to see John Fosbery able and willing to take a rather more active interest in Spanish Main affairs now that he has recovered from his major surgery. We all owe much to him, and we wish him well.

The new season's meetingsbegin on Saturday 17th at 11 a.m. at the Victory Services Club. Exhibits are by invitation of the President, and there should be a varied and thoroughly thought-provoking programme. We are reverting to the Allenby Room, where there is a little more comfort. We hope to see as many of you as possible, for part or all the meeting.

Bernard Davies

STOP PRESS! FROM OUR RIO CORRESPONDENT

F.I.P.

Finn Stjernholck: Postal Stationery, El Salvador. VERMEIL
Dr Derek Pocock: Nicaraguan Airmails. SILVER

Congratulations to them both.

SOME UNSOLVED PROBLEMS CONCERNING THE RETURN LEG OF THE PAN-AMERICAN COSTA RICAN FLIGHT OF DECEMBER 1928

by Dr R H Saundry

The problems concerning this flight have exercised the minds of Costa Rican philatelists for some time and the evidence from the surviving covers and published documents does not give us the whole story. In these notes I reiterate what is available in the literature, add information from two covers in my own collection and ask minds better than my own to provide a more comprehensive explanation of what exactly happened.

The most comprehensive articles in the philatelic press are probably:-

1. Fred O'-Neill, G. (1964) Costa Rica Filatélica, Serial No.58, pp 9-13
   "Primer vuelo de Pan American Airways en Costa Rica".
2. Paulsen K. Bailey (June 1967) Oxcart Vol. 26, pp 29-33.
   "PAA Flight of December 1928: the Return Flight".
3. Fred O'-Neill, G. (June 1968) Oxcart Vol. 30, pp 36-37.
   "More on the Pan-American Flight of December 1928".
4. Paulsen K. Bailey (December 1970) Costa Rica Filatélica Serial 69/70, pp 3-11.
   "El vuelo de Pan American de Diciembre de 1928.
   El Viaje de Retorno".

Article No. 2 is largely a translation into English of article No. 1.

Firstly let us enumerate the known facts:-

1. In November 1928 there was a serious wash-out of a section of the Northern Railroad between the capital San José and the Atlantic port of Puerto Limón. This serious interruption of the fundamentally important route of communication necessitated the rushing of food to the isolated inhabitants of Puerto Limón by the United Fruit Co. by sea. At the same time Pan-American Airways decided to bring forward its projected airlink between San José and Limón earlier than intended.
2. United States Army planes had been operating in Costa Rica from November 30th, but these are believed to have all returned north to Managua on 24th December.
3. A Loening amphibian aeroplane belonging to Pan-American Airways, piloted by Mr Donald Duke, arrived in Puerto Limón from Cristóbal, Canal Zone, on 28th December. This arrival was communicated by telegraph to San José.
4. Notice of the projected daily service from Limón to San José, and return, was given in the daily press announcing that the service would commence the following day, the 29th December, and that mail could be accepted for these inaugural flights.
5. Mail for these flights was stamped in Puerto Limón 29th December, and furthermore in anticipation of a quick turn around, mail at San José was also cancelled in advance with the San José datestamp of 29th December.
6. All the mail on the Limón - San José leg of the flight bore an official Pan-American First Flight cachet, believed to have been applied by the Pan-American agent in Limón, Mr Frank Whiting.
7. Because of adverse weather conditions the flight to San José did not take place until the following day, and the mail was correctly backstamped upon receipt in San José with a datestamp for 30th December. It is established beyond doubt that all the mail dated Limón 29th December was in fact flown on 30th December.
8. Mail accepted to be flown on the return leg of this flight was cancelled in San José as explained above, with the 29th December datestamp. All surviving covers examined bearing the official Pan-American First Flight cachets demonstrated that the same rubber stamp used to apply these cachets in Limón was also used in San José. It is suggested that the Pan-American agent, Mr Whiting, flew as passenger carrying the stamp with him on the first leg from Limon to San José. This use of the same cachet handstamp on covers intended for both legs of the flight is further evidence that covers dated San José 29th December could not possibly have left San José before December 30th.

9. On take-off for the return flight from La Sabana airport in San José, the plane was damaged, the flight aborted, and the service was temporarily abandoned.

10. Surviving covers intended for the return flight addressed to the Canal Zone show arrival dates in Gatun of 7th January 1929.

The question that arises from the foregoing information is how did the mail destined for the return journey (if successful this would have arrived in Limón 30th December) actually get conveyed to the Canal Zone.

The authors of the previous articles suggest that either the letters were taken to Limón by a further flight (more information on this below), and thence by sea to Panama, (a single day's journey), or by land to Panama/Canal Zone arriving on 7th January, and from thence letters addressed to Limón to be forwarded by sea. To complicate the story further we have cicumstantial evidence of the contemporary descriptions given in the Costa Rican press ("La Tribuna" newspaper), and surviving covers apparently carried from San José to Limón by an alternative flight:-

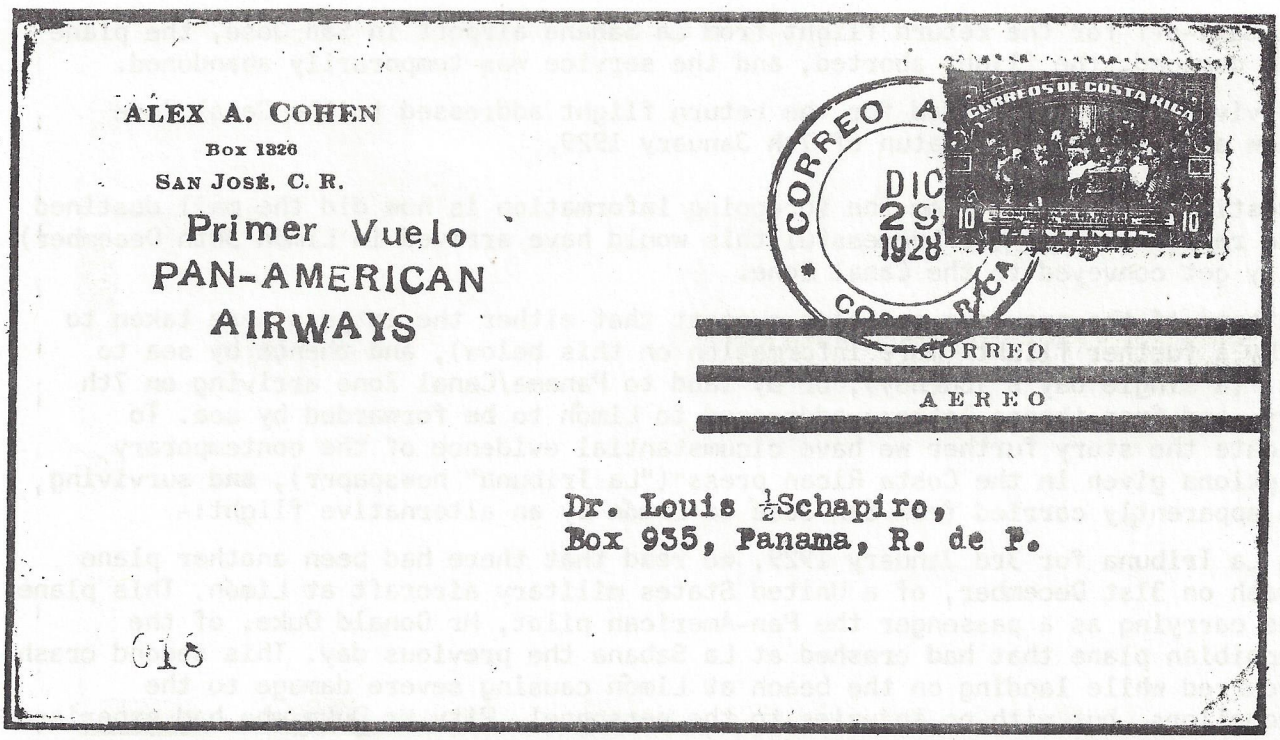
1. In La Tribuna for 3rd January 1929, we read that there had been another plane crash on 31st December, of a United States military aircraft at Limón. This plane was carrying as a passenger the Pan-American pilot, Mr Donald Duke, of the amphibian plane that had crashed at La Sabana the previous day. This second crash occurred while landing on the beach at Limón causing severe damage to the propellors, but with no injuries to the personnel. Pity Mr Duke who had experienced two plane crashes on successive days!

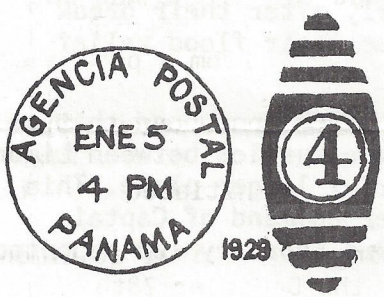
2. In the same edition of La Tribuna, there was a photograph of a flotilla of 15 aircraft in formation flying over La Sabana airport. Clearly after their break for Christmas the U.S. Army fliers had returned to continue their flood relief work in Costa Rica.

3. Further, in La Tribuna of 3rd January, a letter from Mr Whiting announced that as the Loening amphibian aircraft had proved unsuitable for the service between Limón and San José, it would have to be replaced by a more powerful larger plane. This was the five-passenger Pan-American monoplane No. 9726 under command of Captain Duke which arrived in Costa Rica to begin its service on 3rd February (as reported in La Tribuna on 5th February).

The evidence so far presented clearly demonstrates that the return flight covers could not have been effected by Pan-American Airways. Clearly any letters bearing the Pan-Am cachet at San José and despatched to Limón were carried there by means other than Pan-American Airways, since none of their planes were operating in Costa Rica until February. Obviously one possibility was that the mail was sent to Limón with the returning pilot as passenger on the military plane arriving Limón 31st December. Having survived the second crash, mail to Panama and the Canal Zone was despatched either by sea or by another military aircraft. Probably the damage to the crashed U.S. Army plane was not too extensive, and upon completion of running repairs it could have continued on its flight to its base at France Field in the Canal Zone, arriving with the letters on, say, the 5th or 7th January.

This, belatedly, brings us to the reason for this article. I have been re-examining a couple of covers from my fledgeling Costa Rica airmail collection which serves to augment the existing meagre published information. Firstly, I have one of the putative Pan-American return first flight covers, and this is illustrated at the top of the next page. This cover is addressed to Panama City, and as with the vast majority of Airmail First Flight material emanating from Costa Rica at this period, was sent by Mr Alex A Cohen, the eminent Costa Rican philatelist, who at the time was working at the United States embassy in San José. This cover bears the number 018, and is franked with a 10 centimos adhesive (SG 143), cancelled San José 29th December, but is clearly backstamped with the Panama "duplex" datestamp for 4pm January 5th 1929. This is two days earlier than the dates found on the back of covers purporting to be on the return flight but sent to addresses in the Canal Zone. I fully fail to understand why this should be so. Clearly one swallow does not make a summer, so the evidence deduced from



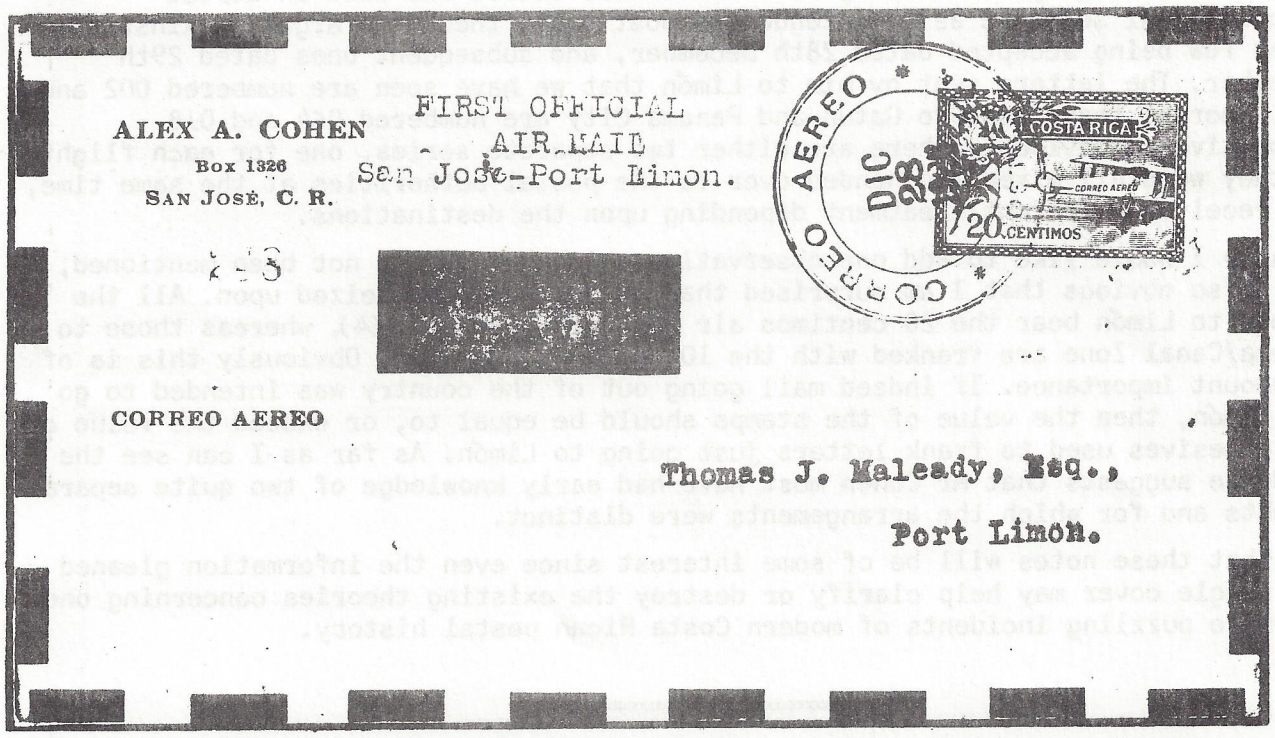


Receiving office date stamp on back

one cover should not be used to necessarily demolish the theories that have been formulated already. Perhaps here there is a coincidental error in the Panama datestamp which had not been altered to the more correct date of 7th January. The whole of this story appears to be shrouded by a series of incorrect datestamps, so a further one is perhaps too coincidental to be acceptable. No, we should conclude that the Panamanian datestamp in the absence of clear evidence to the contrary is the correct one, and this cover did reach there on the afternoon of 5th January. Why then should covers addressed to the Canal Zone be received there on 7th January? If these covers were in fact flown, either directly from San José by military craft to Panama or the Canal Zone, or by the repaired military plane from Limón, the mail should have gone initially to France Field and one would expect that the Canal Zone dates should antecede those addressed to Panama. (Incidentally if the repaired plane was used the usually conscientious Costa Rican postal authroities would have backstamped the letters with the Limón datestamp(s)). On this basis I would suggest that the mail went from San José to Panama by a different route. It might possibly have been sent by rail from San José on the intact Pacific Railway to the Pacific coastal port of Puntarenas, and from there trans-shipped south by sea to Panama City, and from there to the Canal Zone which would in large measure explain the time gap and the chronological order of the datestamps.

We come now to a further group of covers that indicate that a totally independent alternative flight between San José and Puerto Limón was siccessfully completed, and for which my second cover, illustrated at the top of the next page, is a further example. As with other similar covers the adhesive is cancelled with the San José datestamp of 28th December, and has an arrival backstamp for Limón of 10th January. These covers do not bear Pan-American First Flight cachets. The cover that I possess, again sent by Mr Cohen, is clearly inscribed "FIRST OFFICIAL AIR MAIL/San José - Port Limón" and bears the number 248.

How can these covers fit into the overall story? In "La Tribuna" of Sunday 6th January an announcement was made that a single engined biplane of the United Fruit Company was expected to arrive from Tela in Honduras the following day, or possibly on Tuesday, to help resume the indispensible communications with Limón. In the edition of the same



Postmark on back of envelope.

paper on January 11th, we read that this plane had not managed to make its inaugural flight of the previous day (10th January), but further evidence from a published official letter dated 12th January mentioned that a U.S. official had travelled on this flight as passenger the previous preceding day. Clearly the United Fruit Company daily return flights were successfully initiated on 11th January, and were continued until taken over by the larger Pan-American plane following its arrival at Limón 4th February. It is thought that the December 28th letters to Limón with 10th January arrival marks were in fact carried on this inaugural United Fruit Company flight of 11th January, again a case of an incorrect datestamp, but under the prevailing circumstances the postal authorities in Puerto Limón should be forgiven in their understandable exitement for not altering the datestamp from the previous day, which had been the expected date of arrival.

I would now like to add a few of my own thoughts based on what we now have before us:-

1. The circumstances and dates of the Pan-American flight from Limón to San José are fully documented for 30th December 1928, as is the subsequent crash.
2. All mail to Panama or to the Canal Zone scheduled to fly by the return Pan-American flight was in fact taken directly there, not via Limón, possibly overland, or via the Puntarenas route. It is unfortunate that no mail bearing the Pan-American first flight cachet has so far been seen addressed directly to Puerto Limón.
3. There is no doubt that there was an additional scheduled official first flight from San José to Limón with all the mail accepted for this service cancelled 28th December. Why this was on this date is obscure since if it was intended to be carried by the projected Pan-American Airways service, why did it not carry any of the Pan-Am cachets? One possibility is of course that this mail was already bagged up and sealed on the 28th December before the cachet handstamp arrived from Limón on 30th.
4. It is highly unlikely that the mail to Limón arriving there on 10th/11th January went via Panama in light of our knowledge of the projected United Fruit Company flights. If this was in fact the case one would expect such mail to be clearly backstamped in Panama or the Canal Zone.

5. If the numbering system used by Mr Cohen on his covers was used in strict chronological sequence as he intended to post them, then this argues against the first few being accepted dated 28th December, and subsequent ones dated 29th December. The letters sent by him to Limón that we have seen are numbered 002 and 248, whereas those sent to Gatun and Panama City are numbered 064 and 018 respectively. Obviously there are either two separate series, one for each flight, or they were all mixed and handed over to the postal authorities at the same time, but received different treatment depending upon the destinations.

6. Finally I would like to add one observation which has so far not been mentioned, but is so obvious that I am surprised that it has not been seized upon. All the covers to Limón bear the 20 centimos air mail adhesive (SG 164), whereas those to Panama/Canal Zone are franked with the 10 centimos adhesive. Obviously this is of paramount importance. If indeed mail going out of the country was intended to go via Limón, then the value of the stamps should be equal to, or exceed the value of the adhesives used to frank letters just going to Limón. As far as I can see the evidence suggests that Mr Cohen must have had early knowledge of two quite separate flights and for which the arrangements were distinct.

I hope that these notes will be of some interest since even the information gleaned from a single cover may help clarify or destroy the existing theories concerning one of the more puzzling incidents of modern Costa Rican postal history.

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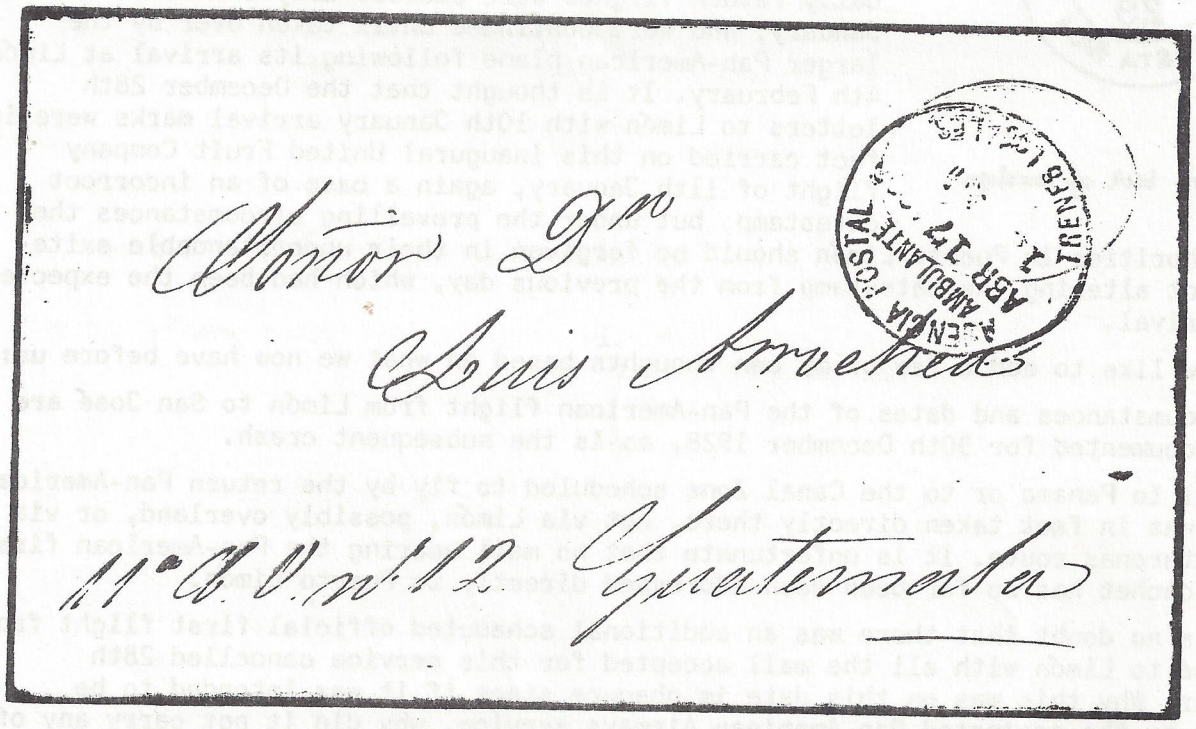
GUATEMALA AMBULANTES By MARK SPYCHER

Further to the article by Douglas Bayliss in CAN 12, of June 1983, I have a 5 centavos postal stationery envelope to Guatemala City dated ABR 17, 1888 with a "TRENES LOCALES" strike. As can be seen from the illustration below, this one, too, has the word "AMBULANTE" above the date.

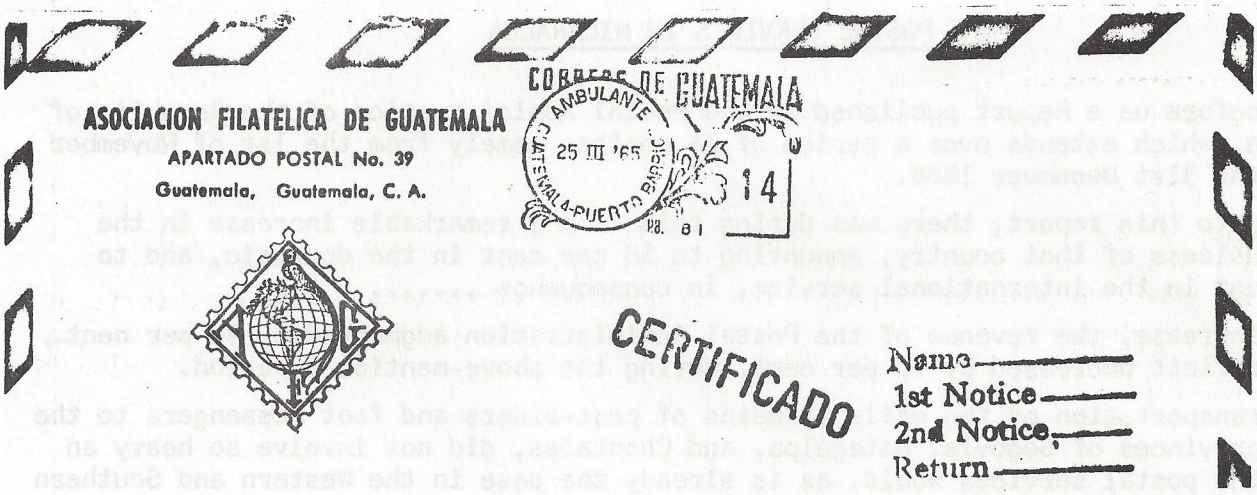


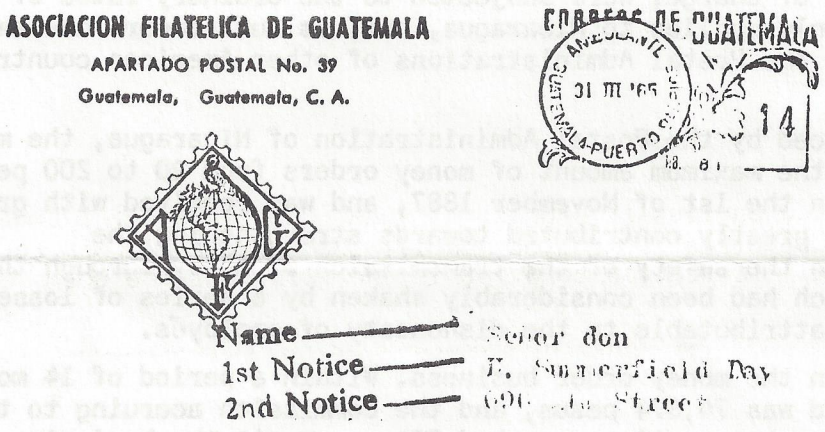
METERED AMBULANTE MARKINGS

Here again we lack details. Short mention about these is made in G2 on page 546, under the general heading of "POSTAL METERS".

The late Ken Clough, Ambulante specialist, in his article in "El Quetzel" No 130 of September 1961 (page 43) thought that these machines were apparently used only during the Christmas/New Year mailing rush. This cannot have been the case as I have covers

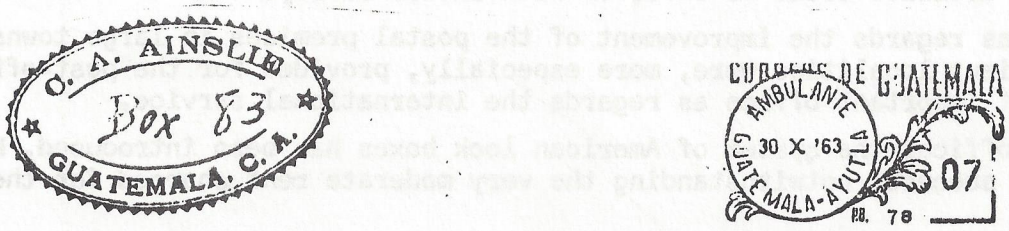
"Guatemala-Puerto Barrios" (Pitney-Bowes machine number 81) dated 25th March and 31st March 1965 respectively.





Both G2 and Ken Clough mention the lines "Guatemala-Puerto Barrios" and "Guatemala-Anguiatu".

Here is an illustration showing "Guatemala-Ayutla" (now called "Tecun Uman") dated 30th October 1963. (Pitney-Bowes machine number 78).



EL QUETZAL

All these meter impressions are in red. Several questions remain unanswered to date:-

1. When and where were these machines installed?
2. How many machines were in use?
3. What is the position today, i.e. are they still in existence and if so, how many?

Can anybody help?

L'UNION POSTALE XV/3 BERNE 1 MARCH 1890

THE POSTAL SERVICES IN NICARAGUA

We have before us a Report published by the Postal Administration of the Republic of Nicaragua, which extends over a period of 26 months, namely from the 1st of November 1886 to the 31st December 1888.

According to this report, there was during this time a remarkable increase in the postal business of that country, amounting to 50 per cent in the domestic, and to 66 per cent in the international service. In consequence .....

"of this increase, the revenue of the Postal Administration augmented by 49 per cent., and its deficit decreased by 10 per cent. during the above-mentioned period.

If the transportation of the mails by means of post-riders and foot messengers to the distant provinces of Segovia, Matagalpa, and Chontales, did not involve so heavy an outlay, the postal services would, as is already the case in the Western and Southern provinces, be a source of revenue to the State instead of being a burden. Even as it is, the deficit in the accounts of the Post Office would disappear and be replaced by a profit, if the very extensive official correspondence of the Government authorities, instead of being conveyed free of charge, were subjected to the ordinary rates of postage:- a remark which not only applies to Nicaragua, but, as our readers are aware, also holds good with regard to the Postal Administrations of other American countries formerly under Spanish rule.

Among the improvements introduced by the Postal Administration of Nicaragua, the most important was the increase of the maximum amount of money orders from 20 to 200 pesos. This measure came into force on the 1st of November 1887, and was received with great satisfaction by the public. It greatly contributed towards strengthening the confidence of the population in the safety of the transmission of money through the agency of the Post Office, which had been considerably shaken by a series of losses of valuable packets, principally attributable to the dishonesty of employés.

There was a decided increase in the money order business. Within a period of 14 months the amount of money orders paid was 74,874 pesos, and the commission accruing to the Postal Administration from these transactions reached 754 pesos. At the beginning, it was believed that the establishment of banking firms in the country would induce the public to make their money remittances through the medium of these banks, and would render the money order system superfluous. This supposition, however, has in no way been fulfilled, for the increase in the money order exchange steadily continues, notwithstanding the development of the banking business. This being the case, the Postal Administration proposes to undertake the transmission of insured articles as soon as a necessity for this service shall arise. This new system would, at the outset, only be introduced between the large towns situated on the railway lines, where the exchange of insured articles could be effected with entire safety.

Much has been done as regards the improvement of the postal premises in large towns. Improved and convenient localities were, more especially, provided for the post-office at Corinto, the most important office as regards the international service.

At some large post-offices the system of American lock boxes has been introduced, but, as yet, with little success, notwithstanding the very moderate rent charged for the same.

A local postal service has been started in Managua, the capital of the country, and at the city of Leon. The postage on letters is fixed at 2 centavos per 15 grammes, and that for post-cards and printed matter at 1 centavo. This system now for the first time introduced in the Republic, has met with the favour of the public, and is working with complete regularity.

A few new post-offices were opened. In consequence of the great interest shown of late years by the Government in the development of the Eastern parts of the country, on the Atlantic Ocean, the so-called Mosquito Reserve, and the district if Siquia, the Postal Administration thought it expedient to establish a post-office at

Blewfields, the chief town of the Mosquito Reserve, and another at Ciudad Rama. These two offices were placed under the control of the post-office at the well-known port of San Juan del Norte (Greytown).

The Postal Administration contemplates the introduction of another measure which is greatly calculated to promote the development of the postal business. This measure consists in stationing a postal employé on board each steamer plying on the Lake of Nicaragua, and on the San Juan river which flows from this lake. This officer will, in addition to his other duties, have to sell postage-stamps for the prepayment of the letters handed over to him during the trip, and to despatch them to the post-offices of destination. At present, the letters despatched by these steamers are conveyed by private persons, a mode of conveyance which affords no guarantee to the public, and involves a loss to the postal revenue.

The delivery of letters by mounted messengers in Managua constitutes a peculiar feature of the postal service in this capital. This service is in the hands of a contractor who had to give security for its proper performance, and the Administration hopes that this scheme will be attended with satisfactory results in point of the safety, and rapidity of the delivery of correspondence.

We may state, in conclusion, that the Postal Administration intends establishing a special section in the General Direction, for the purpose of conducting the correspondence with the International Bureau of the Universal Postal Union in Berne, and with the Administrations of the countries forming part of this Union. Since the entry of Nicaragua into the Union, the international business of the Postal Administration has continued to grow and increase.

Coventions for the exchange of money orders and postal parcels have been concluded with the United States of America, and are awaiting ratification by the legislative bodies of Nicaragua. Negotiations are being carried on with Great Britain for the establishment of a Parcel service, and it is a matter of necessity for Nicaragua to start a like exchange with other Republics of Central America. In order, however, to compare these Conventions, the Administration needs a special bureau and competent officers, and its establishment would, therefore, meet an urgent requirement."

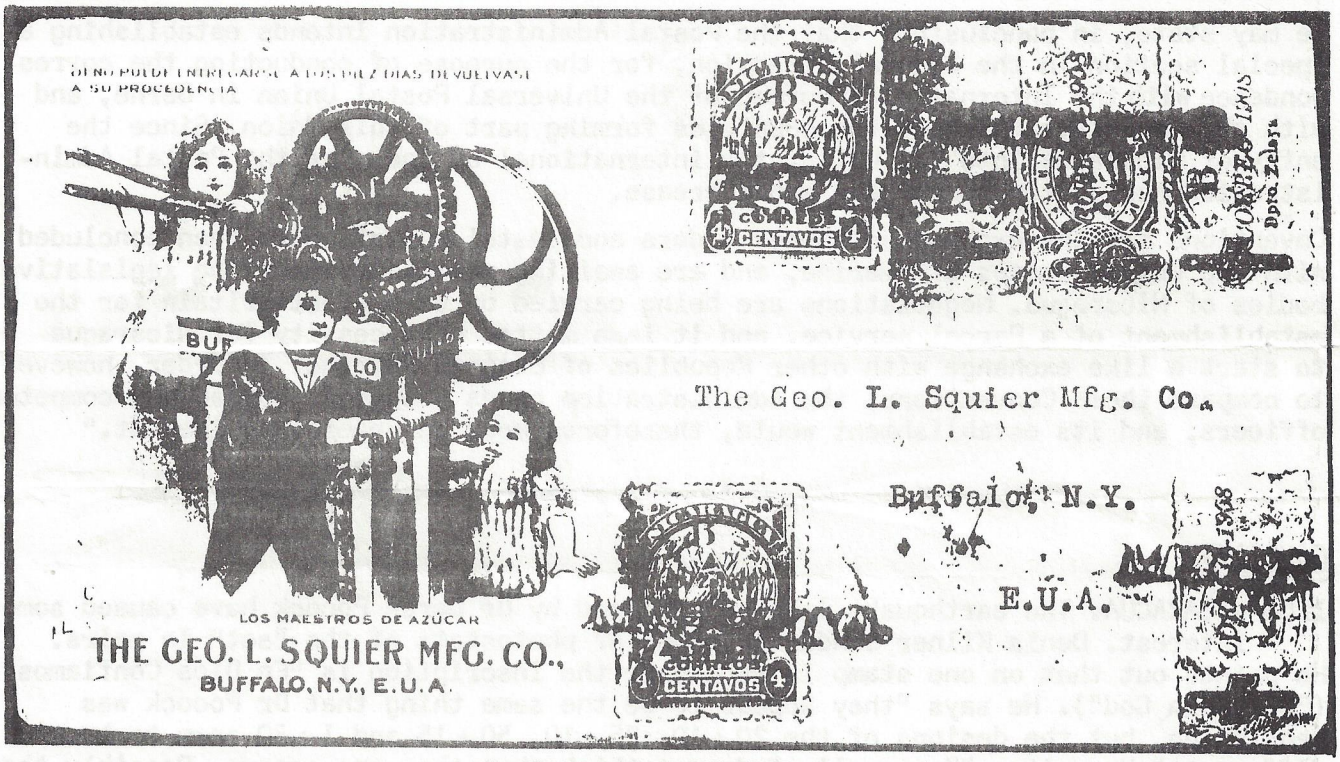
CAUSERIE

1204 NICARAGUA: The earthquake labels mantioned by Dr Derek Pocock have caused some interest. Denis Kilner sends two pages of photostats of the "set" in pairs. He points out that on one stamp in each pair the inscription is "En Dios Confiamos" ("trust in God"). He says "they appear to be the same thing that Dr Pocock was mentioning, but the designs of the 20 + 10, 25 + 10, 50 + 15 and 1 + 30 seem to be different." He writes "Personally I do not think that they are essays. Possibly they might have been produced (by whom?) as a kind of charity label. Proceeds to go to the reconstruction fund?"

We illustrate one of each design below.

ANOTHER UNUSUAL NICARAGUAN ITEM by KILIAN NATHAN

Another cover I found recently is a specially nice U.S. advertising cover in very bright colours, with the interesting MUERTO cancel I had only seen on loose stamps up to now. A possible story of the cover could be: An American salesagent left this preaddressed cover behind so that somebody way out in the bushes of the Mosquito Coast could make up his mind and order such a "home" press for sugar canes. The person went to a nearby or not so nearby gold-mine (there were many in this region) to hand this letter to the person in charge who sold the postage stamps (even "old" ones he still had in his drawer) and who disvalued the stamps with this MUERTO cancelling device he had. Maybe this was also a small "Telegraph Station", i.e. they just had a "ticker". From there the cover was sent by foot, on mule back or with an ox-carriage to WAWA RIVER where the cover was backstamped on May 18th 1912. The further transportation through the jungle took 13 days to Bluefields where it received the transit postmark on June 1st, 1912. From there it went rather quickly to New Orleans where the cover was again postmarked in transit on June 11th, 1912. Altogether for me a very intriguing and fascinating cover, a real showpiece for the "connoisseur".


SI NO PUDO ENTREGARSE A LOS DIEZ DIAS DEVUELVASE A SU PROCEDENCIA
LOS MAESTROS DE AZÚCAR
THE GEO. L. SQUIER MFG. CO.,
BUFFALO, N.Y., E.U.A.
CENTAVOS
The Geo. L. Squier Mfg. Co.
Buffalo, N.Y.
E.U.A.

CAUSERIE (Cont)

1209 NICARAGUA: Clyde R Maxwell sends xerox copies of blocks of four of the P.A.A. 1929 airmail essays. In each block of four one stamp has the "1929" in the wrong font, but unfortunately the copies are not clear enough for reproduction here.

1301 NICARAGUA: Doug. Bayliss comments on the "very attractive" cover of Kilian Nathan's illustrated on the back page. Besides the undoubtedly rare "Buzon" of Masaya there was another mark of equal or perhaps greater rarity - the Momotombo "Telegrafos" used as a transit mark, which Heinze only mentions as having been used to cancel postcards in 1890.

1302 NICARAGUA: Derek Pocock has written to Stanley Gibbons Publications to point out that the font used to overprint the November 1933 Official Airmails (SG0826/0830) differs from their 0121 and therefore needs a separate illustration. He continues "I would also question the existence of the 1935 (6th April) Airmail error allegedly 842A with the overprint inverted. I would suggest that in actual fact the item that is inverted exists as the type 139B (and not 139A) on this value, which would make it No.880A for the 1936 (27th September) series.